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ABSTRACT

Historians of rhetoric have generally accepted the view that Adam Smith rejected the principles of classical rhetoric. However, while there can be no doubt that Smith greatly truncated the five classical arts of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) by reducing his concerns largely to style and arrangement, he did not reject a second major rhetorical tradition that has its roots in Aristotelian rhetoric. This tradition is called the communication tradition and views discourse as the creation of an interaction among a writer, a reader, and a subject (the "communication triangle"). Smith based much of his rhetorical theory on the "communication triangle" and by doing so developed a full theory of style that has its roots deep in the classical tradition. Smith viewed stylistic effect as the interaction among the three elements of the "communication triangle." For Smith, an effective style uses language that (1) effectively conveys the sentiments and thoughts of the author; (2) achieves the desired effects on the audience; and (3) corresponds to the subject under discussion. When language accomplishes all three goals, according to Smith, then the style possesses beauty and effectiveness, which he naturally emphasized. But at the same time Smith also addressed traditional rhetorical concerns. (MS)

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ADAM SMITH AND THE RHETORIC OF STYLE

It has become generally accepted among historians of rhetoric that Adam Smith rejected principles of classical rhetoric in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, which he delivered at the University of Glasgow in the 1760s and which come to us only as a set of lecture notes recorded by students in his course. The seminal statement of this position appears in "Adam Smith's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres," in which Vincent M. Bevilacqua argues that Smith rejected the classical tradition, replacing it with new principles growing out of 18th century epistemology and aesthetics. While there can be no doubt that Smith greatly truncated the five classical arts of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) by reducing his concerns largely to style and arrangement, he did not reject a second major rhetorical tradition growing out of Aristotle's Rhetoric. This tradition can be called the communication tradition with its view of a discourse as being the creation of an interaction among a writer, a reader, and a subject. Now commonly called the communication triangle, this view has been recently developed most thoroughly in A Theory of Discourse by James L. Kinneavy, who notes that the triangle pervades all levels of Aristotle's Rhetoric, including the "three proofs (ethical, logical, and pathetic), the three components of ethical proof, the treatment of each emotion in the pathetic proof, and the four qualities of the rhetorical style," all of which are

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"based on the triangle, at different levels of application" (18).

It is my contention that Smith also based much of his rhetorical theory on the communication triangle and by doing so developed a full theory of style that has its roots deep in the classical tradition. Far from rejecting Aristotelianism, he used it to frame his discussions of style. Being belletristic, Smith's rhetoric emphasizes style and form, but it does so by viewing style as being closely associated with both ethics aesthetics.

The key to Smith's rhetoric appears in Chapter 8 in a much quoted but seldom analyzed passage in which Smith argues that beauty of style results from the following circumstance:

> when the words neatly and properly expressed the thing to be described, and conveyed the sentiment the author entertained of it and desired to be communicated to his hearers, then the expression had all the beauty language was capable of bestowing on it. (36)

As this brief statement suggests, Smith viewed stylistic effect as the interaction among the three elements of the communication triangle. In order of importance, these are 1) language must effectively convey the sentiments and thoughts of the author; 2) these sentiments and thoughts must have their desired effects on the audience; and 3) the language must correspond to the subject under discussion. When language accomplished all three goals, according to Smith, then the style possesses beauty and effectiveness. This statement and the ideas contained in it organize much of Smith's rhetorical theory.

While Smith recognized the importance of all three elements

of the communication triangle, he makes the writer or speaker the dominant element, thereby creating a rhetoric that is expressive in focus. For Smith, style must first and foremost be in consonance with the character of the writer, and this equation works two ways. First, the writer's character produces a style, with a plain man, for instance, producing a plain style, and, second, styles can be categorized in terms of the characters producing them. His rhetoric points in two directions because it can be used to help a student generate an effective style and it can help a reader appreciate and analyze a style and the character behind it. Whether used generatively or analytically, Smith's belletristic rhetoric posits an intimate connection between style and the character producing it.

> Smith makes this connection clear in the following passage: The view of the author, the means he takes to accomplish that end, must vary the style, not only in describing different objects or delivering different opinions, but even when these are the same in both; as the sentiment will be different, so with the style also. Besides this, I endeavored to show that when all other circumstances are alike, the character of the author must make the style different. (36)

By this he means that, if the subject and audience are the same in two cases, different authors will fashion different styles even if they attempt to achieve the same end. Smith makes the aesthetic nature of this point clear when he comments that different characters, "though all good and agreeable, must

nevertheless, as they are different, be expressed in very different styles, all of which may be very agreeable" (36) Stylistic beauties therefore have their genesis in the author's honest expression of character, Smith thereby connecting the beautiful with the ethical.

From his analysis of particular characters and styles Smith makes it clear how important this connection is. Smith considered Swift to write in a "plain style" that grew from his character as a plain man. An advocate of the common sense school of Scottish philosophy, Smith appreciated Swift's rejection of the speculative in favor of the common sensical as well as his advocacy of immediate social benefits over the generation of useless abstract principles. Swift's practical and plain character caused him to write in a plain, no-nonsense style that Smith not only appreciated but advocated as the ideal for all informative writing.

Smith uses Shaftesbury as the example of an ineffective style precisely because this writer never developed an appropriate fit between character and language. One of England's most abstract thinkers, Shaftesbury, Smith complains, developed "an idea of beauty of style abstracted from his own character, by which he proposed to regulate his style" (52). The failure of style results, according to Smith's analysis, to a failure of character which can be traced to three major problems in Shaftesbury's nature and upbringing. First, he was encouraged at an early age by a tutor to believe in abstract notions such as freedom of thought and liberty of conscience without any application to particular situations. Second, he was, Smith

concludes from his letters, of a delicate frame that found such abstract explorations "too fatiguing," (52) with this weakness of constitution preventing him from developing emotionally and encouraging him to replace normal human emotional interactions with abstractions that came to control his behavior and beliefs. Third, his physical weakness and unsound education directed his interests to "matters of taste and imagination," (53) these further removing him from the world of practical affairs and concrete philosophy. This interest in abstract aesthetics pervaded all of Shaftesbury's endeavors from religion to philosophy, eventually causing him to turn to Plato, whose contemporary followers, Smith believed, were impractical speculators wedded to the past. Shaftesbury's character flaws contributed to his stylistic failures because style for Smith must be rooted in a developed character, which Shaftesbury lacked due to his impractical temper. "His style," Smith argues, "therefore, would not be naturally more of one sort than another," (54) and this lack of a natural style caused him to form an abstract notion of style disconnected from his character. In particular, Smith criticizes Shaftesbury for writing ornately.

Smith's discussion of the marriage between character and style offers a highly developed ethical and aesthetic theory, but it also contains some hidden assumptions that explain his preference for the plain style. Because he prefers common sense philosophy and rejects speculative thought removed from practical circumstances and worldly consequences, Smith tends in his rhetoric to favor plain, direct writers such as Swift over ornate

and abstract writers such as Shaftesbury. Smith's elevation of the plain style as a model for much good prose also encouraged him to reject classical writers of the ornate school such as Cicero.

While Smith's rhetoric emphasizes the influence of the writer's character on style, it also gives considerable attention to the important relationship between the writer and the reader. Smith points to this relationship in Chapter 6 when he writes,

> When the sentiment of the speaker is expressed in a neat, clear, plain, and clever manner, and the passion or affection he is poss[ess]ed of and intends, by sympathy, to communicate to his hearer, is plainly and cleverly hit off, then and then only the expression has all the force and beauty that language can give it. (22-23)

The key word in this passage is sympathy, which the student recording the lecture underlined in his notes, and this word would have immediately summoned to the educated 18th century mind Smith's earlier work, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759). This word played a seminal role in Smith's popular and widely influential moral philosophy, which was developed on the notion that, despite human kind's undeniable selfishness, people establish connections and ties among themselves that grow from a natural sympathy, a umbrella term that covers such concepts as pity, compassion, and other kinds of fellow-feeling that form the basis of Smith's moral system. These feelings of connection, which Smith conceives of as fundamental to the human condition, grow out of people's abilities to place themselves in the position of another and to imagine what that person is

experiencing. As Smith explains in Moral Sentiments,

> When we see a stroke aimed, and just ready to fall upon a leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do it in his situation. Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggers in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the corresponding part of their own bodies. (4)

Smith's notion of moral identification between people provides his rhetorical theory with a basis for connecting writer and reader. In order to move readers, writers must project through their prose the sentiments that they themselves feel in order to stimulate similar responses in their audience. Smith uses this principle to attack the notion of style being the use of mere ornamentation, which he associates with the pernicious influence of classical rhetoric. Rejecting the notion that tropes and schemes move audiences, he argues that they are moved by the appropriate connection between language and thought and emotion. For him, an effective style grows in part from the use of "just and natural forms of expressing sentiment" (23) that succeeds in stimulating the writer's sentiments in the reader's breast.

This connection that Smith posits between writer and reader therefore attributes to the rhetorical act an ethical intention. This intention must be expressed by the author in a style that captures the thought and emotion in order to communicate both the the reader, who experiences corresponding sentiments if the style is effective. This effectiveness grows in part from the writer's success in arranging language in such a manner that the sentences "express the thought but also the spirit and mind of the author" (17).

While both the writer and reader play important roles in Smith's theory of style, Smith makes scattered comments throughout his rhetoric to suggest that the subject also influences the style of a discourse. At the beginning of Chapter 11, for instance, he notes that an effective speaker "never seems to act out of character, but speaks in a manner not only suitable to the subject, but to the character he naturally inclines to" (52). Smith's position appears to be that the subject possesses a force of its own that restricts the kind of styles appropriate to it. When writing of Swift's style, for instance, Smith notes with approbation that "all his words shew a complete knowledge of his subject" and that he "does not, indeed, introduce anything foreign to his subject, in order to display his knowledge of the subject; but then he never omits anything necessary" (38). Smith comments similarly about William Temple's prose. Being by nature a simple man, his style tends to be simple and direct, except when he turns to a "figurative style" when it is "agreeable to his subject" (35). For Smith, the subject itself determines to a certain extent the stylistic devices writers can draw on when

writing about it. Smith notes, for instance, that some subjects, such as a dunghill, require considerable art to make them agreeable, and he recommends in this case that the writer use "grand and sublime expressions to describe such an object in an accurate manner" (61). The principle that appears to underlie Smith's argument is that each subject has an integrity of its own that determines the style or styles appropriate to it. Oddly enough, this insight into the importance of subject matter did not encourage Smith to develop a system of invention.

While the subject is important in determining style, the style of any discourse, Smith argues, results from the interaction among the writer, the reader, and the subject matter. Far from being a limited or truncated rhetoric, Smith's is a complex, multi-faceted one that helped establish a strong belletristic tradition in British and American composition and rhetorical theory. This belletristic emphasis grew in part from Smith's own university studies and interests. Unhappy with the traditional curriculum at Oxford, Smith designed a program for himself that required wide reading in classical and modern literatures. When Lord Kames asked Smith to design a set of lectures to improve the use of language in their native Scotland, Smith naturally emphasized stylistic beauty and grace. But Smith also addressed traditional rhetorical concerns that have their roots in Aristotle, and he fashioned a belletristic tradition that contains within its scope two important assumptions. First, Smith postulates a connection between ethics and style, with style being the medium that reflects a writer's true character,

that creates identification or sympathy with the reader, and that presents the subject in an accurate and appropriate manner. Second, Smith's system creates a method for analyzing prose, and he turns much of his attention to the analysis of specific classical and modern texts that function as models of effective, and occasionally ineffective, prose. This analysis is rhetorical in the sense that it probes the models to explore the ways their authors have expressed themselves to readers about subjects. These two assumptions form the heart of Smith's rhetoric, which attempted to instill in his Glasgow students an appreciation of an effective style that would raise the level of spoken and written discourse in Scotland. Though he neglected the art of invention, he recognized the importance of a rhetoric that taught students to appreciate the aesthetics of stylistic grace and organizational facility and, equally importantly, the connection between these two arts and the communication of truth and ethical values.

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Adam Smith's theory of style finds its theoretical basis in the communication triangle that has its roots in Aristotelian rhetoric. This view departs from the traditional one that sees Smith's work as largely a rejection of classical principles. For Smith, an effective style uses language to convey effectively the sentiments and thoughts of the author, to achieve the desired effects on the audience, and to communicate accurately the subject matter under discussion.